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TAGS: PREL PHUM CVIS EUN BO SW

SUBJECT: SWEDEN: BELARUS VISA BANS

REF: STATE 46976

Classified By: Polcouns Casey Christensen, reason 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (c) Polcouns made reftel demarche on expanding travel restriction against Belarus officials to MFA Eastern Europe Director Malena Mard. Mard said that prior to the elections in Belarus, Sweden had been reluctant to play the visa card. The election and its aftermath had changed the equation, and Sweden now supported visa restrictions "somewhere between the six persons currently banned by the EU and the U.S. proposal of 300 names." Mard said Sweden would support including Lukashenka on the list but would likely be reluctant to include family members.

¶2. (u) According to Mard, Sweden is deeply committed to promoting democracy in Belarus and is its third largest bilateral donor, following the U.S. and Germany. Sweden's bilateral assistance is 40 million Swedish Crowns (about 5.2 million dollars) in 2006, and is set to rise to 45 million (5.8 million dollars) in 2007. Programs are targeted at low-to-mid-level bureaucrats, journalists, environmentalists, and local governments, as well as NGOs.

¶3. (c) Mard said that Sweden had, until recently, often been cited by Lukashenka as a model of the "middle way" that Belarus could follow. This had now changed, and Sweden had begun to be attacked in Belarus's media for working against Belarus's interests. Mard called Lukashenka "increasingly paranoid."

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